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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: ARMY COMMANDER DISCUSSES DISCIPLINARY
ACTION FOR 27 JANUARY SHOOTINGS WITH USDP EDELMAN

REF: A. BEIRUT 203
[1](#)B. 07 BEIRUT 1626

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Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b)
and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) In a February 13th office call with Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (USDP) Edelman, Lebanese Army Commander Michel Sleiman reviewed the themes of Army unity, good morale in the Army, and the positive role model for sectarian cooperation the Army provides to Lebanon (Reftel A). Sleiman gave a brief overview of Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) operations over the last three years, stressing the continued unity of the Army. While the demonstrations and subsequent shooting of civilians by the LAF on January 27th have caused tension, Sleiman has taken positive action to address the situation.

[1](#)2. (C) USDP, Ambassador and Defense Attache met with Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Lieutenant General Michel Sleiman on February 13th at LAF headquarters in Yarze. LAF Lieutenant Colonel Edmond Homsy also attended from the Lebanese side. The atmosphere of the meeting was cordial and friendly.

THANK YOU UNITED STATES
YOU HAVE HELPED OUR ARMY

[1](#)3. (C) USDP Edelman opened the meeting by explaining the purpose of his trip to Lebanon and he told Sleiman about the POTUS letter of support for Lebanon. (Comment. This letter was published in the local press in its entirety on 2/13. End Comment.) Edelman assured Sleiman that USG support freedom, democracy and the LAF was both strong and bipartisan. In this light, USDP informed Sleiman that the Comprehensive Training Program (CTP) teams would come to Lebanon in the fall of 2008 to start training LAF units. USDP Edelman also discussed having a working level security assistance review with US and LAF G-3 Operations and G-4 logistics personnel this spring.

14. (C) Sleiman thanked USDP Edelman for his visit and for continuing support from the USG. Sleiman said this support was crucial for the LAF and for its unity. During the last three years, an Army comprised of soldiers from all religious and familial sects has worked together as they assumed security responsibility for Lebanon. Sleiman said he was proud to be the leader of this Army and its soldiers who, "represent the whole country and its political aspirations." For this reason, Sleiman feels that it is imperative to have the support, "of free countries like yours."

THE ARMY IS GOING TO BE FINE
THERE WILL BE PUNISHMENT FOR 27 JANUARY

15. (C) Sleiman described the demonstrations on January 27th that led to the deaths of eight civilians at the hands of the LAF as an "accident" to USDP Edelman. Sleiman told USDP Edelman that he was taking positive action to address these events in order to heal the wounds. Sleiman does not feel that an "amputation of the limb" is required, but someone must be held accountable for events that transpired. Sleiman remarked on how bad it looked that there was not a single injury on the LAF side during those events.

16. (C) Sleiman feels that there are many people in Lebanon who would like to see the Army divided since it would serve their political needs. Even so, he is not concerned. Sleiman has spoken with his officers and given them firm guidance on how the Army should proceed. While this "accident" may have occurred close to a fault line in the Army, Sleiman thinks the Army is past the most dangerous period and it has entered the healing phase where families of the "martyrs" are compensated for their losses.

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17. (C) Sleiman told us that in his opinion, the recent rhetoric by Saad Hariri and Walid Jumblatt were actually helping diffuse the anger over these events. With their speeches, the conversation is turning away from attacks on the Army and back to a discussion of sectarian divisions. While he does not like to see this kind of rhetoric, Sleiman feels that it has clearly taken the momentum out of the calls for extreme measures against the perpetrators of "Black Sunday," the local moniker for the events of January 27th.

THE ARMY IS HELPING CONTROL TERRORISM
BUT THE CAMPS ARE STILL A PROBLEM

18. (C) USDP Edelman raised the issue of the Ain Al Hilweh camp with Sleiman. Sleiman told us that the camp remains a problem for everyone in Lebanon. Sleiman said that even Hizbullah was trying to help contain the Sunni extremism that is emanating from the camps. Sleiman is hopeful that, after the events at the Nahr Al Bared refugee camp in the summer of 2007, the Palestinians will "think slowly" before they do anything in the future.

19. (C) Sleiman told us that he stays in contact with Abbas Ziki, Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah representative in Lebanon. Sleiman is confident that Ziki and his colleagues are helping the Lebanese government as much as possible, but there are still headquarters for explosives and planning in all of the camps. For this reason, Sleiman said, "we cannot support additional refugees with revolutionary ideas."

COMMENT

110. (C) It was apparent that Sleiman did not want to talk

politics in this meeting; rather, he wanted to focus on his role as the Army Commander. The atmospherics of this meeting represented a significant improvement over Sleiman's last meeting with USDP Edelman on October 11, 2007 (Reftel B). Sleiman displayed a dogged determinism to do what is required to keep the peace in the coming days. Let's hope he is able to do this. The meeting ended on a friendly note as the USDP Edelman and General Sleiman laughed together about the Lebanese media and its ability to fabricate stories that have no basis.

¶11. (U) USDP Edelman has cleared this cable.
SISON